

The Memories

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Summary: Forgiveness is returning freedom. It is the key to open our personal prison cell. A short story about redemption, remembrance, friendship and love.

The Memories

****AN:** Run! This story contains an OC and is told from the first person's POV! You can still save yourself! Who wants to read the story with the main hero who is not Hiccup, Toothless or Astrid?

******Anyway if you are above such nonsense - happy reading and happy holidays! (More of my divagations about OCs, truth about the universe and cheap bargains on doomsday accessories are available at the bottom of the story page.)******

* * *

><p>It was snowing. Hard to miss, as it had been snowing here every day and almost every night. However, we have a large variety of weather here from freezing to death to teeth-clattering-cold. In the middle of this oh-so-alluring season we also have our biggest holiday.<p>

Snoggletog.

It was also around that time when she died.

Why am I starting on such a depressing note? Well, it might be a bit dark for somebody who was not bred and raised in Berk. We are Vikings and death seems popular around these parts. Ah, I need to specify what death. Premature kind of death. See, dying from natural reasons is almost a challenge in itself. It's like everybody knows what it is, but nobody has ever seen it. A bit like Trolls. We do not die from old age. We just don't. It is as certain as that the sun will appear and that Earth is flat.

So she died. Her name? It is actually not important.

I was quite a cynic. I think I still am sometimes. Some call it being pessimistic. I call it having a permanent reality check.

Back to the story. That girl changed my life. How can somebody can do this "from beyond the grave"? Well, that is an interesting question. Let me answer a few questions you might have.

Did I love her? No.

Was I friends with her? I would not say so.

Did I knew her at all? Barely...

Was she the one who changed my life? Absolutely.

I am sure you are curious how she did it. Let me tell you a story, then. It amazingly started not with explosions or anything else dramatic.

* * *

><p>I sat by the table and ate some bread with a steaming leek soup. Just ate and breathed. All right, I also sighed miserably. Doing only the absolutely necessary things any self-respecting living being would do to keep a normal life. These routines also helped to silence my mind. My brain hated me and he is the second main hero of this story, not me. I was a cynic, and I was too deep in self-pity to be bothered by another's funeral.

So, my Brain hated me...with mutual feeling from my side. He chose this moment to show me certain facts from my life which appeared not to be connected with the burial. They actually were, but I was playing the denial role extremely well.

I had locked my door and window shutters securely and tried to be as silent as possible. I wanted nobody to hear me if they knocked on my door and asked if I was attending the s_wim-safely-to-the-horizon-until-we-lunch-a-flaming-arrow-after-you ceremony._

Nobody knocked (what a surprise).

I was not social at that time. Do not misunderstand me; I could get along with people well: smile, laugh and do all other._.social ..._ stuff associated with it. I just did not keep any long-lasting friendships.

Anyway, just at this moment, my lovely Brain chose to torment me about a particular topic.

"Why are you doing this to me**, **Brainy?" I asked myself quite loudly, closing my blue eyes in frustration (Yes, I named my brain, _Brainy_. Deal with it). I scratched the weeks- old blonde bristle on my chin. My hay-coloured hair was sloppily pulled back into a long ponytail which reached between my shoulder blades.

I heard a crunch of snow beside the window. I stopped my emerging

monologue(More talking to myself coming! Be very scared), looking at the sealed window shutter. The sound did not repeat**, **so I dismissed it.

"Why should I go to the social function and freeze my bottom off? Because I feel guilty? No, I do not feel guilty, why should I?" I asked Brainy.

He was kind enough to drown my mind in very effective images and emotions.

"All right, so you're making me feel guilty about something I could not prevent nor had any further association with. Congratulations. What is your agenda for me**, **then? Go out there, cry my eyes out, watch the fire and go home? Pointless," I snorted, returning to the intriguing task of crumbling bread into amazingly small pieces. I felt nervous. It was all because of Brainy. Screw him. Screw him so hard. It was his fault for making me feel bad...not mine.

I did not go to the funeral. I did not go out at all. I went to bed early and tried to kill my raging consciousness with forced sleep.

Well, you know the saying the more you want something the harder it is to get it? I could not get my sleep**, **even though I tried.

As usual, Brainy won**, **and I crawled down from my bed. I pulled my untidy hair into its ponytail and dressed myself in a sturdy brown leather jacket with a hood, a matching set of leather trousers and heavy, high laced dark boots. I folded a strong belt around my waist, and slid dark-brown gloves on my hands.

I stepped outside into the starry night with a big, shining moon on top and only a few patches of clouds obstructed the view

It still snowed.

Perfect night for a guilty-driven individual to have a walk. Mindless strolling helped me to relax. I sauntered slowly through the narrow, lifeless streets.

Oh, I forgot to mention that we have dragons. Tons and tons of scaled, fire-breathing deadly killers, who for one reason or another**, **chose our respectable _(insert snort!)_ island to live in absolute peace, harmony, sparkles and friendship with us overgrown apes. Yeah, I know the exact reason why they were here. Some decades ago, one of the Haddock clan freed the dragons from the tyranny of the Big Bad Dragon.

Did I believe that dragons were simply pets and chose to live with us only for free food and scratches?

No, I did not.

I liked the scaly bunch. More precisely, I respected them in a healthy way every Viking respects these powerful, noble creatures.

While walking, I met one of the main reasons I respected dragons, as every warrior should. I met him from time to time when I took one of

my relaxation walks.

He emerged from the darkness as if was one with it, without a sound, like a ghost.

Toothless, the Night Fury, a dark, sleek guardian of the Haddock clan and the whole island.

Call me foolish, but whenever I met him, I always smiled warmly (with my honest smile, not the one I showed to most people just to appear friendly) and bowed my head to greet him. Call me insane, but Toothless always returned the bow without stopping and disappeared into the darkness.

I knew very little about the mysterious dragon. He was crippled, with one artificial tail-fin**, **although it did not stop him from flying. A contraption on his tail enabled him to fly on his own.

After this short encounter, I headed towards the docks, Brainy disturbing my leisure time again. I did not catch the glow of fire on the horizon. The memorial boat must have burned already.

I let out a breath, observing the mist it formed, and I heard snow crunching behind me.

I looked back, expecting Toothless or one of the Viking night shift guards on patrol duty.

It was a dragon. She looked down at me with those yellow, shining draconic eyes which seemed to reflect even the slightest amount of light, making them appear as if they glowed (Freaky only for the first few times).

I did not move. Neither did the female Nadder.

"Lovely night, isn't it?" I asked.

Was I expecting to get an elaborate answer to the most cheesy, cliché opening line in history? No, I tried to disarm the awkward moment with my witty remarks...yeah, I sucked with them.

I surveyed the dragoness for a moment longer.

Deep, azure coloured scales. Check.

Zigzag tail as if something had broken it in two places?
Present.

Broken horn and muzzle with an ever-present smirk. Yes, indeed.

I knew this dragon.

"Evenin'...Stormfly?" I formulated it as a question. This dragon was very evasive. I had spotted her few times before, very briefly. She flew gods-know-where and came back to the island rarely.

The dragoness responded with a chirp which could mean anything and continued staring at me.

"Just to inform you: this is getting kiiiinda creepy," I drawled, taking a step back.

Stormfly continued to gaze at me persistently.

"Right, it was lovely meeting you, but I'll be on my way**, ** then," I, turned away and continued my voyage.

If you had bet anything on the Nadder still following me**, **you won.

This time.

I marched by the ocean. Relaxation had flown out the window already**, ** and I stiffly moved with crunching sounds following me.

Crunch

Crunch

I stopped. I took a step.

Crunch

And another.

Crunch

A mischievous smirk suddenly adorned my extremely unremarkable features. I stepped once more-

Crunch

-and then took a step back, my back bumping into a wall of scales and muscles.

"Ha! Gotcha!" I exclaimed to the stalking dragoness in the middle of the night, alone by the snowy coast.

Silence followed. I will put an extra description for you: I had a maniacal grin on my face, and my fingers were pointed at Stormfly.

(Now, please imagine the most awkward, embarrassing silence which followed something you did you thought was clever Now, really remember the embarrassment. Did you? Good, now you're suffering with me).

Why did I do this? I was and am a goof. I needed to make myself and**, ** occasionally**, ** others laugh. Especially myself. The reason was simple: when I laughed**, ** I did not have to think about sad things (It's all Brainy's fault!).

Once I get depressed**, ** it doesn't go away easily. I mope silently and pretend that I am happy.

Sigh. That was my personality back then.

I put my hands down after this idiotic outburst, and Stormfly

chuckled in her chirpy way. Well, I assumed it was a chuckle.

"Well**, ** somebody appreciates my sense of humour," I joked, looking once more at the dragoness. She peered back with seeming interest, turning her head to the side to see me better. Something like inquisitiveness seemed to gleam out of that bright yellow eye with its black, circular pupil. The mood was...friendly.

I liked to believe that I could understand dragons better than I could humans. I could perceive what they felt or expected from humans. I felt I had a good expertise on dragons. I knew exactly when a dragon liked me or respected me ...or when and how much I hurt that dragon...

"What do you want from me?" I asked, putting my gloved hands into my jacket pockets defensively.

The dragoness continued the starting contest.

"If it involves you vomiting up digested food, I am sorry to disappoint you, but you are not my type," I said in another failed attempt at pointless jest.

I really did mean what I mentioned about respecting dragonkind. And that included no sarcastic comments. That respect for them is why I did not have a dragon of my own. My grandparents, my only living relatives, have one half-deaf male Gronkle and a snugly, ferociously-red female Terrible Terror. I never bonded with a dragon. I felt as if I did not deserve their friendship.

No, I did not have any inferiority issues. I was a fairly tall guy with a fairly strong body and enough skill to kill an enemy with anything from a toothpick to a Morningstar. I was your average Berk Viking.

The dragons seemed to respect my decision**, **and none of them approached me to bond with me. Still they always were well-disposed and amiable to me.

Stormfly's yellow eye bored into me with the mental force and accuracy of a blacksmith hammer. I felt very nervous suddenly.

"C-can you stop looking at me**, ** please?" I stammered, putting my head down, mesmerised by the rich details of my boots.

Surprisingly**, **Stormfly yielded to my request. She trotted to the side of me, sat on the snow and then looked at me as if I were the most interesting thing in the world.

Here is another thing about dragons: they are not really affected by cold.

I sighed as I pulled my hood down to regain peripheral vision and let my heated head cool off. It might snow here a lot, but the snow we have is beautiful. It certainly was on this night. The waves pulsated as they splashed on the coast**, **and snowflakes were floating down slowly in the windless night. The moon light was enough to illuminate

everything as the snow reflected rays from it perfectly.

I looked away from the dragoness, instead looking at the edge of the sea where the burial boat had long disappeared from view. Being fully aware of somebody else observing me, I felt like talking.

"I wonder what happened to you," I spoke as I moved my eyes from the water sparkling with silver lights back to the silent dragoness, "I would like to know what happened to your horn, or to your tail...if you don't mind me saying that it looks quite funny," I chuckled and stepped closer.

I felt I could say whatever I wanted to this dragoness. For me, it is always easier to open up around non-humans.

"I wonder what your story is," I said softly and sat on the snow and crossed my legs. My leather trousers kept in the heat decently, "There are so many questions I would like to ask you...and even more things I want to tell you."

I shook my head, "Nah, not so many...just one, but very important."

I admit I felt nervous and a little stupid at the moment. And yet I felt that talking to Stormfly was the best possible thing in the world.

"That girl...I did not know her. I remember how she looked, how she laughed and that's it...But, above all**, **I can recall how one time she had a weird conversation at the Mead Hall. She and her friends were all drunk**,** and it was hard to tell if they were talking in Norse or just grunting to each other. They had a short talk, barely a few exchanges about how they wanted to be remembered after they died. You know what she said?" I asked Stormfly one of my rhetorical questions, "She said that she just wanted somebody to drop a flower from the highest island cliff to the water... because if someone did this, it meant someone had remembered her life on this world. Just drop a flower from a ginormous rock..."

I looked up at the sky as one of the clouds finally found a way to make the moon disappear**; **the white pinpricks of fluff melted slowly on my face.

Soon after, that girl's weird conversation had finished. Nobody spoke about it again**, **and no one knew if anyone had kept her words seriously or treated it as a joke or a random topic to start when intoxicated.

"Goodnight, Stormfly," I said as I stood up and brushed snowflurries from my pants. I started to crunch my way back to the village.

I barely took three steps after I felt something grabbing me by the back of my jacket and lifting me to the air with amazing speed, followed by my even more breath-taking scream. I should've been proud of myself. As a self-respecting Viking and a competent young warrior, I should've produced my most terrifying battlecry and launched myself into the glorious battle!

I admit, I might have failed at the "launching myself into glorious battle" part. Seriously, you try to attack a dragon which is

carrying you by the back of your jacket when you're flying in complete darkness and knowing there is a freezing ocean beneath with the opportunity to fall a few hundred feet to your death as a bonus!

My battlecry? Lo and behold: "Aaaahhhh! Oh my- I don't wanna die! Ahhhh-!"

This is not the full transcript. Unfortunately, I had to stop my performance because I was tossed like a rag doll into the bloody air! I had to concentrate on not emptying my bladder. After a few ungraceful flips, I landed squarely and, surprisingly, securely on the peacefully soaring dragoness' back.

Instinctively**, **I grabbed the first thing to help me to secure myself**, **which happened to be Stormfly's neck. I hugged my mount as tightly as possible**, **my eyes tightly shut and my teeth clattering.

After a short amount of time that seemed like an eternity, I began to relax.

"I promise, if I will survive this, I'm gonna kick your iron-hard ass," I said quietly, but audibly**, **through the whistle of the air. (Of course I would not have done that, but making threats is something we Vikings do.)

Our journey continued through the night until the dawn adored the horizon. Involuntarily, I gasped. I had never seen raise of the sun from the air. The light subsided as we soared right above the clouds, Stormfly's shadow was visible beneath me on the water. I might have been snatched, but it did not mean I could not enjoy the view. I was gods know how far away from Berk and my old life.

There was also another thing I noticed: tt was getting warmer. The air did not sting my face so much anymore, and I took off the hood and let my ponytail flow in the wind behind me.

The cloud ended and the sunlight blinded me. I squinted my eyes and lifted a hand to end the blight.

Stormfly then screeched loudly in panic. I immediately squeezed her neck, just in time as she performed a lightning- fast barrel roll. Two orange fireballs soared narrowly past us, leaving two trails of smoke and a smell of sulphur.

Stormfly dived down with wings folded. Wind again whistled and gravity let itself be known with great force against my body. The dragoness levelled her dive just above the surface. Just in time, she avoided another firebolt, which exploded at the water, showering us in bilge as we shot forward.

I scanned the sky vigilantly, searching for the enemies, my mind calm and ready. I spotted a dark dot moving fast above and plummeting down in an arc to position behind us.

"There's one at our rear!" I informed Stormfly.

I had an idea, a crazy one. Even if I had finished the Aerial Combat classes with high grades, I really had not had any opportunities to

practice my training. My battle-oriented brain did not consider any possibility of failure, and Brainy was surprisingly silent.

It was time for some badass hindquarters-kicking action!

"Not yet...", I whispered as the enemy behind us flew closer.

I could discern now clearly, who dared to strike us. It was a Gronkle wearing red, ragged pieces of cloth that flapped along its leather-harnessed sides. On its back rode a man a men wearing a pitiful excuse of a dark leather armour. The man was struggling to fire his crossbow. The poor dragon beneath him flew fast, but jerkily, chewing against a cruel muzzle cotraining its jaws.

Realization hit me. This was as Outlaw. These were Viking Pirates. Rejects from the Vikings' societies for various crimes, and they lived only to steal, murder, rape and enslave people. Those people were supposed to consider themselves lucky they had not been killed or tortured outright. Outlaws had once used boats to attack unprepared travellers. However, since Berk had introduced much better means of transportation and attack (e.g. dragons), they learned to mimic Berkians, in a poor, abusive sort of way.

I had seen one of those Outlaw dragons after escaping from such "training". Have you seen the muzzle of a dragon, a horse or a dog who had been hit with a spider club? At first glance these spider clubs appeared like normal spiked clubs. At a closer inspection, though, the spikes on these weapons had been beaten down into hooks. They had one purpose: rip out a piece of flesh with each strike from a dragon's hide.

They were banned in Berk for obvious reasons. We Berklanders take up weapons to kill, but we do not believe in inflicting pain that involves unnecessary cruelty and torture.

That dragon's muzzle...I will never forget how it looked, scarred and tattered from the spider club's blows!

The Outlaw's crossbow release mechanism refused to work as he cursed loudly. Finally, he kicked the side of his mount with a metal-spurred boot.

The Gronckle screamed in pain and fired a fireball, forced to obey its cruel rider.

"Now!" I yelled, unnecessarily, as Stormfly had already started the manoeuvre. She unfolded her wings fully with a brief uplift, avoiding the projective which whistled beneath us. She decelerated rapidly, faster than enemy could react and twisted herself in the air. Before I knew it, I was positioned above the Outlaw. I had a short window to attack, and attack I did.

I swung my leg over Stormfly's neck and jumped down, landing exactly where I had intended, on the Gronkle's back behind my adversary.

He took out a dagger; however, I was faster. I struck the back of his head, confusing him for a moment and, responding to my warrior training, I bent forward and unhooked him from the saddle. I propelled him toward the water with an inviting blow of my knee

against his fear-contorted face. I heard a short yell and then a satisfying splash.

I grabbed the saddle just in time as the Gronkle started panicking, clearly in shock of what happened. I did not try to calm the dragon, as it would have been futile. The poor dragon had to be left in peace so the poor beast could restore a sense of calmness and start to recover from its cruel slavery.

As a last deed for the misfortunate creature, I hoisted the sword out of the sheathe by the saddle. With a few swings against all the ropes attaching the saddle to the dragon, I released the rope keeping the muzzle inside the bloody, damaged jaws of the Gronkle. I jumped up, let gravity carry me where it would, then let myself slow down and drop skilfully onto the saddle-free back of my Nadder friend.

"One more!" I shouted encouragingly to my battle companion, kneeling one leg between her shoulder blades and keeping a hand grasped on one of the long spikes around her neck. I glanced at the Gronkle and I was content to see, after a few jerky movements, the saddle and its jagged, ragged decorations dropped into the sea. With a determined swing of the head, the Gronkle shook the cruel, blood-stained muzzle from its face. The cruel device fell into the sea. Finally, the brown drake was free of any man-made harness. It could be a real dragon, again. It bugled in joy.

"Fair winds, buddy," I said under my breath and concentrated on the next attacker. Another Outlaw now made himself visible in front of us, speeding right at us.

"So you want to play chicken, huh?" I grinned, settling down to sit on Stormfly and hugging her sleek neck with one hand. My other hand wielded a short sword.

"Show me your magic, Stormy!" I yelled as the enemy closed to us.

I briefly saw a brownish Monstrous Nightmare with the same reddish rags flying against his side and a dark silhouette on his back.

Smiling so wide that I was worried I might make my head fall off, I fearlessly awaited what my new antagonist would do.

The Outcast yelled, launching an arrow from the crossbow, barely missing me.

As we were about to collide, Stormfly flapped her wings smartly, folded them and made a roll above the Nightmare and the now-gaping Outcast.

I glimpsed his face and laughed as my trusty comrade extended her wings. How did I go from seeing her as my hated kidnapper to a trusted sister-in-arms so fast? Battle does that to you.

"To the clouds!" I bellowed, pointing at the swirling, white cover above us. Stormfly at once changed course and flew upwards, beating her wings in quick, powerful motions. I could feel her strong chest muscles working beneath my legs.

Our adversary managed to recover from the shock and was, literally,

in hot pursuit behind us. He hit his Nightmare on the head repeatedly with his fist after the dragon instinctively set itself on fire for a short time. Amazingly, the human's clothes and saddle were undamaged. The Outlaws must've used the same substance we used to soak our clothes to make them immune to Nightmare fire.

My smile died instantly. It was not the dragon's fault it had panicked and wanted to defend itself in any way it could.

Dragons do not attack each other for such petty reasons as greed or entertainment. Dragons are not cruel or evil. I gritted my teeth in anger. That man would pay not only for attacking me and my companion with a dishonourable surprise, but mostly for making trustworthy and noble being who could have been a human's most trusted shield and battle companion into nothing more than a slave who could be beaten and abused to appeal to that man's sick need to feel powerful.

In calm voice, I explained my plan to Stormfly, leaning closer to her head.

She continued her ascent, not even looking back at me, but I knew that she listened very carefully and understood me perfectly.

I ignored a bolt as it flew past us, completely off course.

I knew the cruel behaviour that Outcast showed his dragon resulted in the stressed and terrified dragon not being to aim well enough to hit a target with its flame missile.

The cloud cover was nigh, I looked behind me.

Carefully I took my hands from Stormfly's neck and, bending backwards. I let myself slowly drift off her back into the air. I started plunging down, diving in a free fall. I caught a glimpse of my partner disappearing behind the mist, and I rolled rapidly facing my rapidly closing target.

The whistle of the air deafened me, and my eyes started watering because of the howling wind.

I bellowed through the noise, readying myself for what was about to come. The Outlaw raised his crossbow to fire another useless bolt. Luck was on my side as I swung my blade and felt it connecting with something. I heard a short, sharp cry. It quickly silenced as I continued falling like a cannonball. I managed to turn quickly against the air and saw the remains of the enemy's fire contraption rotating in the air, and his face showing fear mixed with rage.

I smirked as the enemy became smaller in my vision, his eyes still glued on me. He had obviously forgotten that he was not fighting against only me. And I knew what was coming next!

I noticed the blue blur shooting out from the clouds at the disoriented Outlaw. Even though my hearing was extremely limited, I could hear the agonising screech of the human as Stormfly collided briefly with the Nightmare. The Outlaw's body was tossed off the self-firing mount.

The dragoness did not waste time. She plunged after me, wings flattened along her sides and head rigid, looking more like a bright,

blue flame than a living creature.

That's right, I was only a distraction.

I was not worried that she might not make it in time to catch me. She closed and finally caught up with me, positioning herself by my side. I caught one of the spikes on her neck and pulled myself onto her bare back. Stormfly shoved off with her a thrust of her wings as she unfolded them. Two, impressive white wisps of air formed at the tips of her wings as we levelled our descent right above the water.

I couldn't help but to laugh in the joy of finding a good partner in righteous battle.

"You got some good moves there, girl!" I congratulated her at the top of my lungs!

The adrenaline rush effects were wearing off, though, and I felt a pulsating pain in my wrist gaining with strength with every passing moment. That block with crossbow must have strained my hand. We were not exactly taught how to strike whilst freefalling. No matter how harsh you think Viking training was, the sword I had been using was not a paragon of war-oriented weaponry. However, I did not let go of the blade yet. I needed it for one more thing.

I repeated the sequence I had done with Gronkle for the young male Nightmare, freeing him from the undeserved torture. I let myself fall back onto Stormfly's back as fast as I was could once I had cut the dragon free of his harness.

I did not interact any more with the young dragon; he had gone through enough stress already.

Finally, I tossed the sword away. Now, it was only a dead weight to me.

Stormfly then returned to her original course, heading east. The monotony of blueness below and above switched now to the grey and green scenery of cliffs and forests under us.

"Welcome to the Kingdom of Scotland," I murmured joylessly.

I still did not know why I was being brought here. I decided to wait (Yeah, I had sooo many choices beside that like: a) jump off my ride and announce as fell "I don't care I am going home" or b) have an enriching and profound conversation with Stormfly in which she would explain the mysteries of universe to me. I usually like having my options open).

I noticed no snow on the ground, indicating the surface was quite warm for the season. I realized that I really looked forward to standing on something like solid ground again.

My garments were sturdy, tasteless in style and**,** above all**,** functional. Along with solid woollen underpants**, **my leggings and tunic and jacket had kept my buttocks from chafing into oblivion. After I had been riding a dragon without a saddle for quite a long time.

I soon saw a town below us, easily ten times the size of Berk,

pentagonal in structure. The tall walls protected a beautiful, centrally-located citadel with a long, colourful flag on every tower

I couldn't marvel at the sight for long**, ** as a few spots launched from the city and shot towards us.

I felt a pang of well-placed worry. The spots were flying in a perfect attacking formation, eight in power. They quickly gained on us. I also saw glimmers of silver as they flew. These were armoured dragons.

"Sorry to disturb you, Stormfly, but I need some serious _fly-the-Helheim-out_ speed**, **here," I said as nonchalantly to Stormfly as I could.

The dragoness did not react**, ** or perhaps she did not hear me.

To my astonishment, she flew _towards_ the attacking squad, flapping her wings gently. I bit my lip**, **considering my options (Remember the options I presented you before? I re-evaluated them and came to this astounding conclusion: I was screwed).

"All right, lead the way, lass," was all I said**, **and I silently hoped these armored dragons would not shoot us or fry us before letting me speak first.

The Citadel Rangers (well, that was what I decided to call them) took their positions. I felt as I was reliving dragon battle formation training again. Two riders were behind me, then one on each side of me; Add one below, one above and two at the front. That made eight in total.

They were well away from the range of my Nadder's fire, but still close enough to skewer us with arrows from the reflexive bows each of them carried and were so cordially aiming at us.

This was called the Sphere Formation, used to escort or to entrap**, ** although we Vikings had our own name for it.

The Cage. Once you were inside it, you had slim chances of getting out.

I surveyed my "escort" cautiously. Each dragon had a few plates of armouring, light and strategically placed to protect their most vital points**: **chest, belly and sides. None of the dragons wore muzzles or anything resembling such. All the beasts seemed focused and fearless, peering at us watchfully. Their human riders certainly knew how to fight and cooperate with dragons.

I was so screwed.

A sonorous, low roar echoed through the air**, **and another dragon joined the formation. It was the biggest, meanest-looking red female Monstrous Nightmare I had seen. A human rider sat on the top of her neck. The truly monstrous beast wore heavier armour than the others**, **and the person sitting on her neck sported a similarly-coloured set of what appeared to be some sort of shining leather armour with a black mouth-piece and red goggles. The rider's short brown hair ruffled in the impetuous wind.

The Nightmare came uncomfortably close, and I could see her armour had been made from dragon scales. I was willing to bet my hand to whom those plates belonged. I had no choice but establish the dragon's rider as the leader of our escort.

The reddish beast grunted**, **and Stormfly answered with a piercing screech of her own as if announcing herself.

Every dragon howled back in a tone of respect.

The Nightmare's rider whistled loudly and made a clearly visible circle with a right hand. At once**, **eight of our escort in perfect unison disengaged and banked away from us. They reformed the V-formation and headed toward the city.

I peered up at the only guard left. To my astonishment**, **the commander pressed an armoured fist to the head and bowed as much as the position on the saddle allowed.

I realized they knew how Berkian warriors greeted each other. With much less grace I repeated the gesture.

Without a word, the Nightmare set herself at our left side, slowing momentarily to let Stormfly lead. I was open to anything, anything to help me understand what was happening.

The flight did not long last for long and**, ** shortly**, ** Stormfly neared the ground by a small forest shimmering in autumn colours.

Gently, my ride landed**, **folded her elegant wings neatly and crouched on her legs. Taking it as a request for me to kindly disembark**, **I jumped to the ground, scowling as my legs started to work as they normally should.

My mysterious guard unstrapped the riding harness and jumped off the Nightmare, patting the dragoness' neck and saying something. Then he/she stepped aside and folded the hands behind in a passive, unthreatening position. Then the leader gave me a slight bow and did not move.

Before I could do anything, the Nightmare crept forward**, **along with Stormfly. Not knowing what to do**, **I bowed back to the leader and followed the dragons.

Fallen leaves rustled beneath my boots, and the wind created a whirlwind of colours as they danced on the road. It looked beautiful enough to cause me to forget about my confusion. Whatever I was here for, I was soon going to find out its purpose. I took a look back**, ** the guard was still there, observing and unmoving. I averted my gaze and ran after my reptilian guides.

"Hey**, **wait for me! I have a pair of short legs here!" I shouted in pretended anger, trotting closer.

My beastly companions were now going up a gradual hill. I ran like an idiot, sprinting past the dragons up the elevation as if the top of it would be the goal of my journey.

It was and it was not_ (I like complicating things).

I panted as I saw who sat before me.

The bright, green eyes looked at me without any real expression for a moment, and then their owner snorted with amusement and looked away.

"T-Toothless?" I asked stupidly**, **not believing what I saw, yet here it was.

There was the Night Fury, the guardian of Haddock clan in all his black-scaled, fanged glory, sitting on his hunches. He now wore a beautifully tooled saddle and flying harness. A couple of travel bags had been attached to his rigging.

Toothless regarded a tall obelisk**, **which appeared to be some sort of monument with markings carved into its surface.

"I did not expect to see you here, Ælfr," a deep, masculine voice startled me, right in time so I could close my opened mouth.

I quickly regained my composure and managed a dignified scowl at the person calling my name.

I royally hated my name. My parents did not give me a hideous name like every other dignified patriarch ought to do. Instead, they wanted to be "modern" and give me a plain Norse one. As I child, I was afraid for a long time to sleep in the dark**, **as my boring name did not give me the protection against gnomes and trolls. My childhood fantasies always ran wild, creating scenarios with me getting eaten by insatiable fantastic creatures (I hate you**, **Brainy!).

"I prefer to be called 'Bonecrusher', Sirrah," I retorted with poorly practiced smugness, delighting in my very original and ear-pleasing Viking name.

Stoick Horrendous Haddock II**, **Berk's leader**, **rose from his knees from beside the obelisk.

I could be so casual with him**, **as he utterly hated all formality.

He wore a long, black flight robe which fell down to his knees and hid any cloth or weapon he might have had beneath. His madly-red hair fell unbound from his head to his shoulders. Riding goggles hung from his neck.

He smiled at me, his lips barely visible through the bush of ginger facial hair, his green eyes twinkling with mirth.

"But your preferred name is so long I can't remember it all. However, I could name you 'Bony' since you could use a few more muscles on your body," Stoick countered my retort with one of his own, and his smile widened.

I had a very good idea why they had named him after one of his ancestors. Whoever his grand-grand-grandpa was, he must have been as much of a joker as the current version was. Stoick the Second just

couldn't keep his face straight for longer than ten seconds and his "ruling" consisted mostly of setting pranks for anyone in the nearest vicinity.

I should let you know, that despite having such a bubbly personality**, **Stoick was competent in the leadership department. His ever-present smile was balanced by his grim facade whenever the Village faced a problem or had to engage in battle and in seeking occasional wisdom. Many enemies who faced his keen, calculating mind, intense dragon warrior and sword skills and steely green eyes have felt the terror of how dangerous a battle leader and foe Stoick the Second can be if you earn his wrath. It is said that, when Stoick is in battle, his eyes and Toothless' blaze with the same dangerous fury that enemies should fear.

I mercifully let the insulting comment go about my manly posture. Instead, I looked at Stormfly**, **who seemed to be engrossed in looking straight ahead. She passed by Toothless, brushing her tail along his side. She disappeared from my view as things suddenly became dark and I felt uncomfortably confined.

"What the-!" I tried to yell. My voice came out muffled**, **as I had the dark leather and heavy weight of a man's chest against on my face. My ribs hurt as Stoick hugged me tightly. I thought he would release me. Alas, he did not stop until after a few, very awkward**, ** seconds.

"Happy Snoggletog," he said at last.

Oh,_ that_ was today!

"I _hate_ this day," I said earnestly and was hugged tighter in response.

" Air! I need air!" I gasped**, **and Stoick let go of me.

"Not. Funny," I gasped flatly as the Chieftain broke into guffaws, painting his face redder than a beetroot soup.

"But that's what this day is about! Snuggling and caring!" Stoick answered with a wide grin.

Before I retorted with a possible prediction of bodily harm, his face became serious, "How was your trip? No problems along the way?" He asked with concern.

"It was satisfying in its monotony," I said in ironic neutrality. There was not much to elaborate.

I looked around and tried to catch a glimpse of the blue dragoness, but she was gone.

I felt a pang of sadness.

Stoick put his massive hand on my shoulder**, **and then he brought back his big smile again.

"All righty**, **lad. I need to go back for the citadel's council meeting," he said nonchalantly and strolled away.

"Wait! Aren't you going to ask me what I'm doing here?" I demanded. It all seemed weird enough.

"Oh, but I _do _know why Stormfly brought you here. _You_ need to figure this one out for yourself. You're smart enough. Now**, **I have to go maintain alliances, make formal appearances and such. Ta-ta!" Stoick gave me a farewell with a negligent hand wave and left without turning back.

I "adored" such mysterious speeches and inexplicable events. They usually gave me a big, fat headache. So much for living a simple, happy life!

I tapped my foot. I had two choices: wait for Stoick to be back and demand more information**, **or find the answer on my own as he suggested.

My foot tapping increased in tempo.

I felt eyes on me and saw Toothless giving me a bored, not amused stare.

"I'm going to find this one out on my own, aren't I?" I asked flatly.

The Fury rolled his eyes and snorted as if saying**, ** "Duh!".

With a sigh, I approached the obelisk.

I tried to read it. It was in an alphabet I did not recognise. However, after a closer inspection I saw a short addition written in Norse runes.

_Here in the year _(Couldn't read clearly) _took place a battle between the Fifth Regiment of Scottish Troops aided by The First Company of Dragonriders of Berk Island against The Second Legion of the Roman Empire. Thanks to the legendary bravery and uncanny skills of the dragon riders_**, **_the Scottish troops were victorious._

Below were the names of those who died on Berkian side. I remembered this, now, from the history books.

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III had honoured the ancient treaty with Scotland and sent his troops to help them, leading them in the first line. There had been a lot of discussion if Berk should honour the treaty**, ** as it was old and there were almost no political connections left with Scotland. Hiccup**, ** however, had seen this as an opportunity to secure Berk's position and gain a powerful ally. Scotland ultimately won the war and remained independent. Berk had gained respect and was able to flourish from this decision.

I read every name on the obelisk, kneeling lower and lower as the list went on.

There were two names at the bottom, bigger in size and more elaborate in description.

Snotlout the Eldritch of Jorgensen House, Rider of Firewyrms**, **_the Ruby of the Sky- Father, Husband, Son and Best

Friend._

Ã•strÃ-Ã°r the Ambitious of Haddock House, Rider of Stormfly the Sapphire of the Sky- Mother, Wife and Daughter.

_May the Halls of Valhalla be open to them. _

I stood up and approached Toothless.

"Do you know where I can find Stormfly?" I asked Toothless in as nonchalant voice as I could muster. The dragon stared at me as if judging me and then gestured with his head to behind the hill. The Nightmare lay curled nearby, resting, her eyes following me from under the metal covering her massive head.

"Thank you," I nodded my head and stepped to the edge of the terrain formation to look at what was before me.

At first glance, everything was covered in red.

Then I saw movement in the soft red waves as the wind rippled its surface.

Below me was a vast meadow of flowers, beautiful and red as blood. It was probably late Autumn, and yet they appeared like fresh spring blooms. I had no explanation for that.

In the middle of this red sea, a lonely blue shape lay.

I walked through the sea of flowers towards the dragoness. She was looking into the distance at something only she could see, unmoving.

She averted her gaze as she heard me rustling through the monochromatic wonder.

"Hey," I greeted with a solemn smile as I sat down amid the crimson corn poppies (I learned their name long time later) and crossed my legs.

She regarded me with her shining eye**, ** as she had back on Berk.

" Look at this, Stormfly, I have more flowers than I would ever need to honour that girl's memory...", I trailed my voice off and picked one of the plants with my left hand.

I rolled the delicate stem between my fingers, " Thank you for bringing me here...thank you for sharing this with me...for sharing your past with me."

I marvelled at the delicate corn poppy petals, " But it does not make us even, girl. I wanted to find a red flower. I wanted to honour that girl, but not for her sake...I am not so good."

I looked up at the attentive yellow eye.

" I want to memorialise her to remind myself of what I am sure I've lost...she looks exactly like _her_, " I sighed, shaking out a lock of my hair out of my eyes, " You up for a sappy story?" I asked with a smirk.

The yellow eye blinked.

"Of course you are," I answered softly and looked to the blue sky.

"I...had a friend. Not just any friend, but a person who happens along once in a lifetime. We could talk without exchanging a word. Spend time without worry, jealousy or any other dark emotion which seemed to haunt people. She was my safe place, somebody whom I could seek with anything. Even when I had a problem, I forgot it when I was near her. It was my small paradise, dragon girl," I closed my eyes, feeling the breeze on my face.

"Then I ruined it all. I had an episode in my life when I needed approval of others. An adolescent feeling now I feel embarrassed about," I spoke faster, trying to let it out as quickly as possible. I had never told anyone about it, "At one point, I realized all my friends had gone their ways, finding new lives with partners in relationships. All except one...

"Then one night I drunk..I don't remember how much. I felt that it was unfair that all my guy friends had found a lady partner and I didn't," I involuntarily put my left hand over my face in shame, the gorgeous red flower slipping to the ground.

I squeezed, my fingertips digging into my skin," I do not remember how it happened, but I ended up in bed with her...probably forced her...and when I was about to...she closed her eyes, red faced, not pushing me or pulling, she only said 'No,'

"..that's all she said**, ** and it made me stop, just in time."

I pressed my jaw shut, my hand pressing harder, dealing me pain I felt I deserved.

"I dressed myself and walked-no- I ran away- like a coward. I've avoided her ever since...

"You know what sucks about such a deep friendship? I knew how she felt exactly...I knew that until that day. After that, I lost it...I lost that spark which kept us together and there was not a day or moment that I have not regretted what I did.

"And I know that I can't have it back, that something was lost to me**, **and **it was I who devastated something so beautiful**! " I shouted the last part, panting from the self-hatred.

I steadied my breathing and let my hand drop. Stormfly looked at my explosion without emotions, not judging me or hating me.

I wanted her to hate me for it.

I took a last agitated breath," I wanted this flower because... that dead girl reminded me of my friend, and when she was gone I asked myself what if it would be my friend who died next? What if she would be gone from my life**, **and I would never have a chance to even apologise to her? To make her feel better? I hurt her**, **and I haven't done a thing to make it easier. That thought scared me, girl," I said to the silent dragoness, "It scared me more than

anything in my life. If I could get this flower...then I think I would have had the strength to face my friend and the destruction I have caused."

I chuckled humourlessly, "This is who I really am. I wanted to do what the dead girl wanted to help myself."

I picked up the fallen flower once more in my hand, "And I want to go back to Berk now," I felt a surge of energy in my body and jumped to my feet.

I had my decision and determination.

What then? Hesitantly**, **I took one step closer to Stormfly.

"Would you like to come with me?" I asked. I had to ask**,** even though I knew the answer from the very beginning.

Stormfly blinked and averted her head to look once more into the distance. Seeking a long vanished soul.

Crestfallen, I walked away from the dragoness, keeping the mysterious flower close**, **and I kept it in this way as I waited by Toothless for Stoick.

The Chieftain returned near twilight. He greeted me cheerfully and looked at the flower I still held.

"Did you find your answers, lad?" He asked in a fatherly voice.

"Yeah," I said, trying to put on my most convincing smile as I stowed the stalk behind my belt.

Stoick patted my back, hard**,** without asking more questions and jumped onto Toothless' back.

"Here! Put this on" he said throwing me a dark cloth bundle. I unfolded the material and saw a dark flying robe, identical to his. I had really missed having such a garment on my flight here.

"And this," Stoick threw me goggles to match the uniform.

"Thanks. Can I keep them as a Snoggletog gift?" I asked jokingly, donning the eye protectors.

"Sure!" Stoick shouted to my surprise and offered me a hand to help me to mount the Night Fury. I accepted**, **and he lifted me effortlessly into the air. I sat behind him and looked expectantly behind us, where the red poppy meadow was.

"What is it? Would you like to wait?" The village leader asked me.

"No...let's go," I said in a small voice and folded my hands around Stoick's waist. The enormous, red-bearded mab patted the Night Fury's neck and strapped himself to the saddle. He took out dark gloves from one of the pouches on his belt and put them on.

"Toothless...take us home, please, Old Friend."

The sleek dragon nodded his great head complied**, **and we took off with amazing speed.

The hill, meadow and Stormfly disappeared behind us.

"If you don't mind me asking, lad. Why do you think Stormfly took you here? It's been a very long time since she took anyone to this place," Stoick asked me with obvious curiosity.

I put my hand between the buttons of my new cloak to check if the red flower was still behind my belt.

It was still there, safe and secured.

I mulled over the question and**, ** strangely**, ** Toothless craned his head back to look at me.

"I think...I think she wanted somebody to see the past so somebody will remember it**, **" I said as I thought about it," Then**, ** even after she passes away, somebody will keep the memory of her rider and herself alive."

Stoick did not answer anything**, **and soon any conversation would have been impossible as Toothless smirked mysteriously and darted through the sky at full speed, the whistle of wind consuming everything.

LINEBREAK LINEBREAK LINEBREAK LINEBREAK LINEBREAK

"Can you drop me by the cliff off the west side?" I asked as we neared the island. It was dark already**, ** and the holiday festivities must have started.

"It'll be my pleasure!" Stoick said with shady enthusiasm. We soon hovered above my destination**, ** snow billowing with every beat of Toothless' powerful wings.

"Get yourself ready!" Stoick yelled to me.

I unfolded my hands and waited for the touchdown.

"Toothless, would you be so kind to drop our friend here?" Stoick asked sweetly.

Before I caught on to it, the traitorous Fury gained a bit of speed and positioned himself upside down. Needless to say**, **I fell to the ground with a surprised, high-pitched shriek. Thanks to the snow, nothing happened to me.

"Happy Snoggletog! Ho! Ho! Ho!" Stoick bellowed with joy as he flew away on the currently most hated mount in the whole world.

I grumbled few well-chosen insults as I lay on my back. I took the material off the lower part of my face and pulled my goggles down.

"I'm gonna ho-ho you so hard at the party," I already ticked it off on my mental list.

Then I remembered something. I lifted myself and checked my most valuable possession at the moment. Amazingly, the flower was fine.

Sighing with relief**, ** I approached the cliff.

Without adding any dramatic line**, **I held the flower in front of me and then let it go. Like a fragile crimson memory, it disappeared into the darkness below.

I stood there, thinking about many things at once with accompanying whimsical imaginary from Brainy for an indefinite moment.

Soft steps behind me forced me back into reality.

I would have expected _anyone_.

Anyone except her.

I did not have any speech prepared; I could not think straight, I just stared.

And then she ran to me and pulled me into a tight hug

"It feels good to be hugged by a girl for a change today," I tried to dismiss the mixture of embarrassment, confusion, shock and guilt with a joke, but she knew me for too long. She spoke as if I have never said anything.

"I was so worried when you were gone. Nobody knew where you went," My best friend said in her always-gentle voice, her head buried against my chest.

I only saw her chestnut-coloured hair below my chin. And I was still deprived from speech.

"I-I checked on you yesterday...trying to hear you inside your house. I wanted to know ..if you were fine," she spoke, letting emotions flow and squeezing me harder, embarrassed from what she had confessed.

That explained that sound I had heard at my window last night.

It was not what I came here for._ I_ should have been the one seeking comforting words.

I put my hand on her shoulders and tenderly moved her away, looking into her eyes.

I also let _my_ emotions flow, telling her my deepest thoughts. I formulated my apology as best as I could. I gave her my heart and my hope. It was my only chance for redemption**, **and there was no price I could put on it**, **and no price I would _not_ pay for it.

Snoggletog is considered a time of wonder**, **and I was about to experience it twice.

It was the first time.

She placed her hands at each side of my face and looked at me with shining, green eyes.

Gods**, ** she was about to cry. I had done something wrong!

Confound me! I failed!

"I was afraid," she started with a honest smile, "Afraid of something ending, but where something ends, something begins and, thanks to your words and promise... I am not afraid anymore," she spoke softly.

I did not deserve such attention and devotion or to feel so happy.

Well, whatever self-pitying plan I had**, **it blew out of the window as she pulled my head down into a tender kiss at top of that snowy hill.

* * *

><p>A year passed, and I walked once more at the beach by the ocean, again at night. I found myself pretending that it was snowing again.

I strolled and listened to the waves**, **as I had one year ago.

I took these peaceful, thoughtful walks often and, before I knew it, they became my routine I did before going to sleep.

Today was Snoggletog Eve again.

Crunch

Then I heard it behind me, mimicking my feet. Two steps.

Crunch

Crunch

I smirked and did one quick step forward and then turned back.

"Gotcha!" I exclaimed with a mad grin, but I dropped it quickly.

There was nothing behind me, only snow starting to fall slowly to the ground.

Here I was getting myself excited over nothing!

Then something nudged me on my back.

I twirled in place and was greeted with a big, yellow eye staring at me intently. The scaled muzzle smirked slyly.

"You got me there, girl," I spoke with a wide grin and booming happiness at heart.

Stormfly faced me straight on**,** and I saw that she had something between her teeth. A small flower, red as blood. As if offering it, she lowered her head and held it in front of me.

All emotions burst outside. Was it possible for one person to feel so happy?

As steadily for a weeping man as possible (yeah I cried like a baby. It was messy, cheesy and I loved it!) I took the flower presented to me. It was Snoggletog again**, **and to comply with the spirit I leaped and hugged the dragoness by the neck making a teary mess of myself as her head tenderly rested on my back. I only managed to squeak my next words through my tears of joy.

"Welcome...Welcome home."

* * *

><p>AN: So here it is. Original story with original character said from quite original first person's POV. Tell me what you think after the beep.

If you are not into ramblings, skip the part below.

**Beep.

>

Now, more of my thoughts about OCs. I seriously do not understand people who do not read stories containing or having main focus on so called Original Character/s. The whole term was and is alien to me. Here is how I see it.

Let's presume you wrote a story about a young Hiccup. Do we know for sure how the boy acted when he was 5 or 6? Nope, as there is no information about it in the movie (there might be some in the books, but I concentrate on the movie now). To me, that young Hiccup you have created is an OC. Why? Because you created something original without having any information about the behaviour movie makers had in mind. However, people seem to think that if you will give character name Hiccup it will be magically desirable to read about child's antics. Here is the news. It is the power of suggestion. Nothing else, nothing more.

**Another example. Toothless. By Gods, there are so many fics about him. Him (or Her!) acting as a dog, as a human, impregnating boys etc etc(I am guilty as well for creating my own version of Toothless in The Truth is a Shard of Ice. Luckily, not raping anyone at the moment). We do not know almost nothing about the dragon, but again...if you will write a story about a Night Fury named Toothless you are forgiven most of the time no matter how you portray him/her/it.
**

Summing this pointless rumbling up. Do not care if the story contains or is about OC/s. If the character is enjoyable and is able to tell the story well. Read it. The end.

**See you in a few days with the next chapter of The Truth story.
**

****Merry Christmas/ Happy Snoggletog. ****

End
file.